

The Portrayal of Gays and Lesbians in the Media

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Not only because I am a gay male am I interested in the topic at hand, but because I believe that in the 21st century, the gay male and the lesbian woman are the minority figures that are going to be greatly molded and remolded in today's mass media. Every minority group has had their day with the media, trying to fight for proper representation within film, television, advertising and print media. I believe that nowadays, both the media and the queer minority are in a back-and-forth discussion about what is proper media representation of this minority group. With that said, I believe that it is important for one to stay on top of the subject and keep a running list of where we've been, where we're going and what needs to be done before these portrayals can be truly accurate.

The Importance of Visibility:

Underlying the research and information about the media representations is the idea that visibility and proper visibility is important to any minority group. The way in which the different forms of media present you to the public eye, speaks volumes about social acceptance, the misunderstanding about a minority group, and a society atmosphere. Also, these representations can change social acceptance, correct the misunderstandings about the group, and tweak the social atmosphere. It is because of this ability to change social acceptance that visibility is so

important to gays and lesbians. “Increasingly, the lines between gay culture and straight culture are blurred, as gay themes and images enter into the everyday iconography of American society. To see the ever-present queerness in the most prosaic straightness is important to be sure, as it has been for every oppressed minority.”(Walters, 21)

Similarly, just by the simple fact that there are media organizations designed to combat negative stereotypes and designed to offer journalists, reporters and advertisers the tools with which they can better their coverage and portrayals of sexual minorities. Both GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and NLGJA (National Lesbian and Gay Journalist Association) are responsive think tanks that take a proactive look at this coverage as it happens in today’s mass media. “At GLAAD, we are in the business of changing people's hearts and minds through what they see in the media. We know that what people watch on TV or read in their newspaper shapes how they view and treat the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people around them. And we have a responsibility to make sure those images foster awareness, understanding and respect.” (www.glaad.org/about/)

Where we are now – Television:

Most of the discussion taking place today is dealing with then new wave of gay and lesbian representation we seem to be witnessing. With shows like “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” and “Will & Grace” on television, many are beginning to note the growing change in media portrayal. Also, in February, Viacom is expected to launch LOGO, a gay and lesbian network. But this isn’t always because of a welcoming attitude toward gays and lesbians. It sometimes

can be influenced by outside forces like profit motivations. “In recent years there has been some improvement in the representation of gays and lesbians on mainstream network television. The popularity of shows such as *Will & Grace*, *La vie, la vie...* or *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* illustrates that networks are willing to feature gay characters, as long as the shows draw high ratings, and generate profits for advertisers.” (www.media-awareness.com).

We want you – Gay and Lesbian Advertising:

Being included in advertising efforts means that you are part of the American fabric – or at least your minority has similarities in buying and a large enough disposable income. But what is more important is *how* these advertisers see your minority and how they advertise to you. Again, operating under the idea that how you are represented is how you are seen, advertising is another aspect of mass media in which one can investigate how portrayals of gays and lesbians are these days.

Inclusion of gays and lesbians within advertising involves both including queer images and specifically attracting gay and lesbian buyers – the latter, some think, is more important. “The media are making progress in its depiction of gays and lesbians. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the active courting of gay and lesbian consumers through gay-positive advertising and marketing campaigns.” (www.media-awareness.com)

Sharing this information:

These days, studies regarding human sexuality are growing among academics in high education. Just look at UNC. This fall, we will begin our

hown Sexuality Studies Program – a minor that is expected to be fairly popular with students. In most of these general, politics classes regarding sexuality, media portrayal is one the most important aspects of these studies. So this information that I searched for and found is ideal for college-aged students looking to dive into the world of queer citizens in the U.S. Not only is this information for those studying about the topic, it also can be helpful for those learning to *make* the media (the journalists, the filmmakers, the advertisers, etc). If these people want to accurately and properly portray the lives of LGBT citizens, then a comprehensive collection of information providing everything from history and resources surrounding the subject would be a great asset.

On the Web:

Such a subject as gay and lesbian media portrayal is both very scholarly (because you are talking about politics and history) but also very friendly (because you are talking about popular television shows, movies and advertisements). So the Internet representation of such a section would be a run along the fine line between the two. It will be very comprehensive, however, simultaneously very easy to navigate.